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Let's Meet! Let's Exchange! LETS as an Instrument for Linking Asylum Seekers and the Host Community in the Netherlands

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Dutch asylum seeker centres tend to greatly restrict the opportunities for asylum seekers to develop their talents. One project, which seeks to overcome the isolation suffered by such refugees, is the Local Exchange System Circle Woudrichem (LCW). This exchange circle has brought asylum seekers in Woudrichem into contact with the local community. This article illustrates how the LCW has developed over the course of time and how local people and asylum seekers have come to meet each other through the exchange of goods and services. Furthermore, it examines the nature of the interethnic reciprocal trust relations and the motivations of the various kinds of participants. The gap between asylum seekers and local people was bridged by stimulating contact between them in a structured fashion. The exchange circle under discussion appears to be a 'modern' form of organization, which can generate bridging social capital in present-day western society.

Keywords: asylum seekers, LETS, bridging, interethnic relations

Introduction

LCW is a Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS). Local Exchange and Trading Systems are community-oriented networks in which goods and services are exchanged. These exchanges take place in return for LETS units, a local currency for barter between participants in the scheme. A number of LETS units are added or subtracted by the LETS administration from the members' personal accounts for each transaction. The use of a local currency implies a more flexible system than direct exchange (Hoeben 2003: 7–8).

Experiments started in the USA and Austria during the 1930s and were widespread in the UK throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Aldridge and

Patterson 2002). It was assumed that LETS circles would give an impulse to local trade because they created possibilities for people who ordinarily have few opportunities in the conventional economy. LETS can be seen as a modern version of local solidarity, which can prevent social exclusion (Komter 2003: 181; Williams 1996; Williams and Windebank 1999: 108–109) and encourage community building (Seyfang 1997: 1).

Participants joined LETS for different reasons. For example, those not having paid employment refer to:

the multiple benefits gained from work including obtaining goods and services, re-training or skills upkeep, meeting people and maintaining social contact, and identifying, communicating and offering skills to people in the local community (Aldridge *et al.* 2001: 570).

LETS were regarded as a tool for poverty reduction and a new form of self-provision, but in reality their economic role is rather limited and only a small number of core members (about 10 to 25 per cent) participate on a regular basis. Moreover, 33 per cent of all trade transfers would have taken place without a LETS, such as between friends and relatives (Aldridge and Patterson 2002). The effective functioning of a LETS scheme depends on several conditions as shown below.

LETS seem to be operating most effectively in small-scale, self-contained, middle-class areas with a relatively stable population, especially those places with a 'green' or 'environmentalist' reputation (...), but they clearly do not perform well in large, ethnically and class diverse urban areas with relatively transient populations (Aldridge and Patterson 2002: 279).

Although LETS may contribute little to local economic development and poverty alleviation, they may have potential uses, such as in the LCW where asylum seekers and the host community are brought together. Before examining these linkages, the socio-cultural and socio-economic background of asylum seekers will first be discussed.

Asylum seekers have a start in the Netherlands that is quite different to that of other newcomers. Dutch refugee policy fails to adequately link the reception of asylum seekers to the process of integration that follows for those refugees who are actually admitted. The Dutch government has taken the principle of being 'strict, yet humane' as its point of departure for dealing with asylum seekers. The daily lives of asylum seekers are largely determined by the demands and the restrictions that are imposed on them as part of the asylum procedure. Throughout the duration of this procedure, which around the turn of the millennium took an average of four years, asylum seekers are hardly able to develop any activities, such as education, work and learning the Dutch language, which enable them to participate in Dutch society. Asylum seekers find themselves in a 'waiting room situation'; living in a refugee centre severely restricts the possibilities for how one can spend

one's day (Coumou 1999: 15; Ghorashi 2005: 190; TCOI 2004: 167). These conditions can have disastrous consequences for asylum seekers with traumatic past experiences, for their freedom of movement is also restricted. They have no opportunity to build up a new life in the host country, which reminds them of the dangers and frightening experiences in their homeland (Ghorashi 2005: 190; Young 1990: 237). Moreover, refugee centres tend to be located outside built-up areas, literally isolated from the rest of society. This physical distance means that contact between asylum seekers and native Dutch people does not come about easily, despite both groups being open to it (Klaver *et al.* 2005: 73). In Woudrichem, asylum seekers as well as local people can participate in the LCW exchange circle. The scope of the LCW is unique; although a scheme involving LETS and asylum seekers was set up in Birmingham (Government of Birmingham 2004), there is only a single reference to it on the website and it is now defunct. However, in the following, we shall restrict ourselves to a detailed discussion of the Local Exchange System Circle Woudrichem (LCW).

In 1999 an asylum seekers' centre was established in Woudrichem, a town in the south of the Netherlands with 14,000 inhabitants. For three and a half years, the centre was located on the boat 'Embrica Marcel', which housed a total of 250 asylum seekers. Various local inhabitants visited the asylum seekers. Discussions with the asylum seekers revealed a desire for contact with the local population and participation in activities. Although asylum seekers are allowed to develop hardly any activities while applying for a residence permit, it was possible to set up an exchange circle. It was decided that a Local Exchange Trading System (LETS) would be created, which resulted in the LCW project.

Two of the local inhabitants, Nel Heidinga and Toine Korthout, took the initiative to start this project. Working together with some asylum seekers, they managed to launch it a few months later, in 2000. The aim of the LCW project was not only to focus on bringing the local populace and asylum seekers in contact with one another, but also to offer these refugees useful ways of spending their time.

This research study examines the role that the LCW project has played in the establishment of contacts between asylum seekers and the host community, comprising white Dutch only. It explores the potential value of the LETS as a way of passing the time and providing opportunities for the participation and integration of asylum seekers. The study was evaluative in character since the refugee centre was closed before this research took place. The research data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with 17 former inhabitants of the centre who were at the time living in diverse locations throughout the Netherlands and 17 members of the local community, including the initiators of the project, who participated in the LCW during the period July–December 2004. The interviews took place in people's homes, where other members of the households in question also often contributed to the conversation. The collected data were analysed using the

constant comparative method (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 6, 10), which implies that data sampling and analysis are an integrated process. Analytic sessions were thus regularly organized during the data collection period. After the data collection, the data were coded and labelled. The coded perceptions, visions and relevant information were described in a matrix, which offered the possibility of making a typology of the interviewed participants in LCW. This process ultimately led to the typologies presented in this paper.

Before the integrating role of the LCW is discussed in detail, we shall first examine what the scholarly literature has to say about the establishment of interethnic contacts and projects, which aim to promote the generation of social capital that is associated with such contacts.

Interethnic Contacts and Social Capital

Contact between different ethnic groups is not always easy or self-evident. It can be said that 'social inequality, lack of familiarity with the other and ethnic prejudices lead to them having little to say to one another, which in turn only reinforces the discomfort on both sides' (Hollands 2006: 13). To achieve interethnic contact it is essential that both parties are open to it. Not all members of the local community are particularly benevolent towards asylum seekers. In such cases, a negative attitude towards others often goes hand in hand with a positive attitude towards one's own group (native white Dutch); which is also referred to as an ethnocentric response (Scheepers *et al.* 2003; Tennekes 1994).

Openness between different ethnic groups is more easily achieved if the people in question know one another. The notion 'to be known is to be loved', as it is formulated in the contact hypothesis, assumes that contact with one or more people with a different background will lead to less prejudice and more openness towards the group to which they belong. However, research has demonstrated that being familiar with a specific ethnic group does not automatically lead to empathy for its members (e.g. Bovenkerk *et al.* 1985; Miller and Brewer 1984; Smets 2006; Smets and Den Uyl 2008). Moreover, it appears that what may be favourable for a specific group can turn out quite differently for individuals or other groups in society (Komter *et al.* 2000: 54; Portes 1998). Trust in group members often goes hand in hand with the distrust of others. The strong inward-looking focus of group members leads to closer networks and less openness towards those outside one's own group (Elias and Scotson 1994). Lack of familiarity with the other plays a key role in this. If people (want to) know little or nothing about the other party, they will feel uncomfortable during their interactions with them. To avoid experiencing these feelings in the future, they will avoid having contact with them as much as possible and will quickly cut short interactions. Trust, through having knowledge of the other, is a precondition for interethnic contact (Duronto *et al.* 2005: 556–558).

Reciprocal trust relations also play a role in the establishment of contacts between asylum seekers and the host community; this can be understood using Putnam's concept of social capital. It is generally assumed that having less social capital makes people less happy, less healthy and less prosperous. Moreover, people are subsequently less able to cope with crime and danger. Putnam (2000: 183–284) attributes such a low degree of social capital in American society to socio-cultural changes, such as the privatization of leisure time in which electronic entertainment has come to play an increasingly more important role, an increasing number of households in which more people do paid or unpaid work, and the greater physical distance between work and home. In order to analyse the aforementioned developments, Putnam makes a distinction between bridging and bonding social capital, although, in practice, these can be found in all kinds of combinations. Bridging social capital refers to the weak ties between people and different social groups, including also ethnic ones. This capital ties people to acquaintances who are part of other networks. Contact with another network can be good for spreading and receiving of information and connecting people to external resources such as work. Bridging networks are heterogeneous and have an outward focus, which means that they can transcend social divides, such as class, ethnicity, religion, gender and lifestyle. Bonding social capital results in strong ties between people of the same backgrounds and from the same group, where mutual trust, solidarity and support is deemed important. Bonding social capital can reinforce social stratification with respect to other social groups (*ibid.*: 22, 358).

The terms 'social network' and 'reciprocity' are often uttered in the same breath. Nonetheless, there is hardly any agreement with respect to the relationship between the two. According to Komter *et al.* (2000: 32), reciprocity refers to a process in which an object or service is exchanged in order to develop or maintain a network. The reciprocal exchange of material (goods) as well as immaterial (assistance, services) objects provides the basis for a network of enduring social ties. Such exchanges lead people to become involved with and develop moral obligations towards one another. In contrast, Putnam (2000: 20–21) views the causal relationship between networks and reciprocity as follows: networks cultivate norms of reciprocity. Putnam contends that norms of reciprocity are *advanced by* social networks, while Komter *et al.* (2000) claim that reciprocity *promotes* the development of social networks.

Reciprocity relates to the exchange between two parties. A degree of equality can only be achieved when both parties in an exchange relationship have rights and responsibilities and when objects or services of a similar value are exchanged. The resources, autonomy or requirements of the giver and recipient, which can be dependent on existing power relations, can greatly differ (Komter 2003: 75–76, 93). If one examines reciprocal relations in terms of the social distance and duration of the reciprocal transactions, two kinds of reciprocity can be distinguished that are relevant to this study: balanced

and generalized reciprocity. Balanced reciprocity often concerns the nature of exchanges between equals, which are accompanied by the expectation of an immediate return within a fixed and foreseeable timeframe. This is typical of transactions whereby one party has something that the other desires and purchases with cash, as one would at a supermarket. In contrast, generalized reciprocity, which is also known as weak or undefined reciprocity, does not have any strict obligation to make a return in the short term; the obligation is instead a long term one. This kind of reciprocal relationship is typically found in families and intimate social relations. Gift-giving provides an example of generalized reciprocity, for when giving a gift it is expected that the other will reciprocate by also giving a present when an appropriate opportunity arises (Sahlins 1972: 195).

Trust is also an important aspect of social capital when it allows network members to carry out their transactions more effectively (Putnam 2000). Following Putnam's division of social capital, Poulsen and Svendsen (2005) make a distinction between bonding and bridging trust. Bonding trust refers to the trust that exists among people who are members of the same community, while bridging trust relates to trust in non-members of one's personal network. Trust can be viewed as a lubricant for a variety of social transactions. People must be able to trust each other when they work together; they expect not to be exploited or deceived, but instead to get something in return for their cooperation (Field 2003: 62). In this way, strong social trust between local residents can make a positive contribution to the development of social capital (WRR 2005: 162).

There are also a variety of approaches with respect to the causal relationship between trust and cooperation. Indeed, trust can be seen as a precondition for (Field 2003: 55; Komter 2003: 136) and as a result of cooperation (Gambetta 1988: 226). Lang, who combines both perspectives, notes that:

LETS runs on trust but it is not necessary for people to trust each other when they join. For the system builds up the necessary trust, and as people trade their trust in each other increases (1994: 81).

Trust is a dynamic concept: a person can trust someone at a given moment, but these feelings can diminish or conversely even grow over the course of time (*cf.* Bijlsma-Frankema and Costa 2005: 263). Trust is not just based on face-to-face relationships, but can also be characteristic of institutions and groups. In this regard, Giddens (1990) distinguishes between two types of trust. The first kind is interpersonal trust, which can stem from encounters between individuals. People become acquainted with one another through such meetings, which lays the foundation for a growing belief in each other. The second kind is institutional trust. This relates to trust in abstract systems and the assumption that there are no encounters between the individuals that are responsible for it (Giddens 1990: 34, 83). Luhmann (1988: 102) refers to institutional trust as 'confidence' and interpersonal trust as 'trust'.

Putnam assumes that reciprocal trust relations have become eroded in modern American society. The reconstruction of social networks—a gradual and cumulative process—is dependent on dedicated social leaders and the creation of new places where people can meet and recognize each other, talk and enter into relationships (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 286). The use of technology, such as information and communication technology, urban and regional planning and political will all play a significant role in the creation of such places today (*ibid.*: 294). Moreover, the frequency of such contacts is important (Miller and Brewer 1984; Desforges *et al.* 1991), which does not detract from the fact that personal attributes, such as personal characteristics and previous experiences with minority groups, can play a role (Brewer and Miller 1984: 295). In addition, keeping things on a small scale can also increase individual responsibility for preserving the group.

[S]maller is better for forging and sustaining connections. On the other hand, bigger is better for critical mass, power and diversity. (...) Furthermore, for achieving diversity and 'bridging social capital' (...) size is necessary. Smaller can easily mean parochial, and smaller groups risk a not-in-my-backyard orientation. If there's somebody else nearby who is not part of 'us', there is a constant temptation to redefine borderline problems as Somebody Else's problems (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 277–278).

When seeking an organizational form for a specific context, it is fruitful if it can also be applied in a slightly different setting. These are places where people can meet each other and the presence of multiple relationships is an advantage (Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 291). Hollands (2006: 36) offers an example of this, namely refugee centres, where asylum seekers come into contact with professionals and volunteers from the host society. She points to the importance of the adaptability and critical (self)reflection of the asylum seekers, but also to the ability to make the connection between experiences in the past and the present day with an eye to the future (cf. Ghorashi 2003). In the following, the dynamics and operation of the LCW will be further explored.

Exchange Circles

The LCW was largely based on the principle of a LETS circle. Nonetheless, the extent to which these general research conclusions are also applicable to the LCW remains to be seen. Indeed, the LCW project is different from other LETS in various respects.

The aims of the LCW project were to provide asylum seekers with a useful way of spending their time and concrete activities. It also sought to help them establish contacts with the local population, to give them an opportunity to become familiar with the Dutch language and society and, finally, to also increase their spending capacity. The local population's goal was to come into contact with asylum seekers to learn about other cultures and to reduce

prejudices (Van Wanrooy *et al.* 2003: 13). The establishment and maintenance of the project was made possible by sponsors, local government and church organizations. Diverse teams of volunteers (50 in total) and a management group were set up to organize activities. The LCW participants had considerable contact with each other, yet at the same time they also initiated contact with the outside world. In this regard, they had both bonding as well as bridging social capital at their disposal.

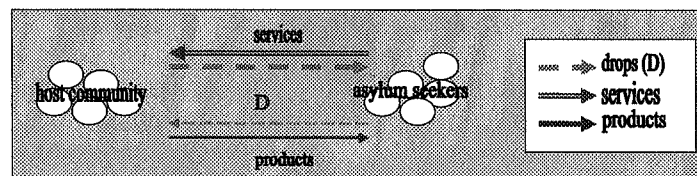
Social activities and trade were the two most important aspects of the LCW circle. A LETS currency unit known as the 'Drop' was used for trading activities. During the three years in which it was in operation 5,100 transactions took place and 244,000 Drops (in Dutch *Druppels*) were spent on trading goods and services (Van Wanrooy *et al.* 2003: 23). Alongside trade, social activities were a vital part of the LCW. The goal of the various events was to facilitate contacts and trade between the participants. In May 2001, the LETS house was established in the centre of Woudrichem. Many activities, such as a discussion evening, language classes and a crèche, were organized at this location. This house, with facilities such as a shop and coffee room, became the central locus of the LCW.

Over the course of time, the LCW underwent four different phases during which the nature of the transactions acquired another character. The individual phases in the trade system are discussed below.

Phase One: Simple Trade

In the beginning, asylum seekers primarily offered services and went to work in the homes of private individuals. Some examples of their activities are painting, repairing bicycles, housework, gardening, sewing, hairdressing and babysitting. The host community offered fewer services in return. The Dutch participants mainly earned their Drops by offering products such as second-hand goods. Most of the transactions were between the asylum seekers and the Dutch; hardly any transactions took place between members of the local population or among the asylum seekers. During the first phase, asylum seekers mostly earned Drops, while the Dutch participants primarily spent them (Figure 1). This lopsided situation led to the initiation of phase two.

Figure 1
Simple Trade



Phase Two: Exchanging and Shopping

As a consequence of the phase outlined above, the trade system stagnated. Asylum seekers had difficulty spending their Drops and the participants from the host community found it difficult to earn them. This situation gave rise to the need to look for a solution that would give the trade a new impulse (Van Wanrooy *et al.* 2003: 14). Those Drop spenders who found it difficult to offer products and services themselves (mainly the host community) were able to pay off their negative balance with euros. In addition, in 2001 a LETS shop was opened for the Drop earners, which offered new possibilities to spend one's Drops. Thanks to an exchange fund, the LETS shop was able to buy, amongst other things, telephone cards and foreign food products from other shops. During this second phase, the transaction model was better attuned to the needs of both the asylum seekers and locals (Figure 2).

Phase Three: Businesses and Non-profit Institutions

Although some women visited local people's homes weekly, the tasks available for men were often incidental. Indeed, the demand for services decreased when there were too few local private individuals for the asylum seekers to be brought into contact with. While there was less demand for services, the supply remained unchanged. The LETS shop was a favourite place to spend Drops. At this time, the LCW decided that it would also allow businesses to participate in the project. Two possibilities were created for these businesses: internships and sponsored labour. An internship gave asylum seekers the opportunity to work in a company if that firm also wanted to train someone. Some internships were at, for example, a graphic design studio, a cleaning company, and several local farms. The second option was to offer sponsored labour at local non-profit institutions, such as an elderly day-care centre and a school. The LCW would then pay the asylum

Figure 2
Exchanging and Shopping

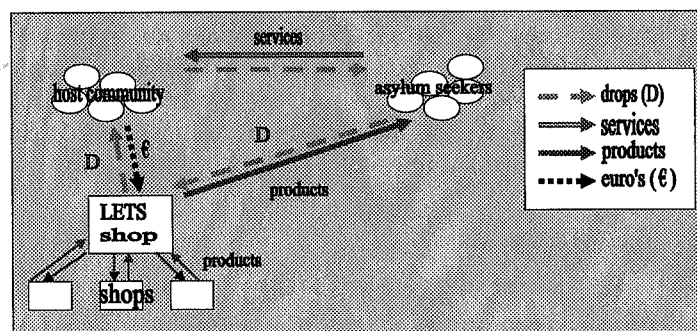
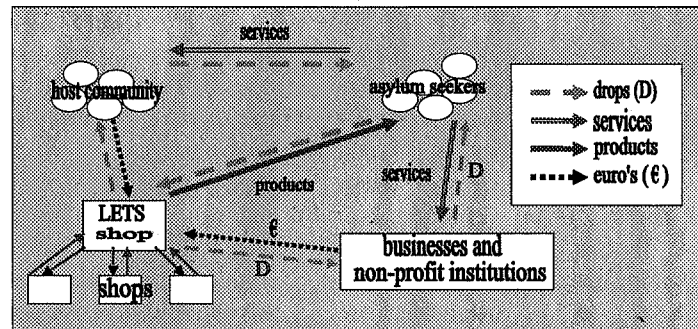


Figure 3
Businesses and Non-profit Institutions



seekers an allowance in the form of Drops (Figure 3) (Van Wanrooy *et al.* 2003: 18–20).

Phase Four: Final Phase

On 1 March 2003, the asylum seekers' centre in Woudrichem was closed down, which led to a decrease in participants. The organization of LCW activities was thus put on the back burner. Nonetheless, in 2005 it was decided that the work of the LCW should be continued in a slimmed-down version. The LETS house was still available during that year. Asylum seekers who were still living in the vicinity of Woudrichem and asylum seekers from other refugee centres could continue to participate. The LCW carried on in this smaller scale and several discussion evenings and a barbecue were organized. Nevertheless, the activities of the LCW were formally terminated in March 2005.

The LCW may be compared to the general findings about LETS circles. At the LCW, the arrival of asylum seekers provided the direct stimulus to establish a LETS circle. Although most LETS circles get off to a slow start, the LCW was able to mobilize many volunteers and participants within a short space of time. During the various phases of the LCW, an unbalanced growth between supply and demand can be observed, which according to Hoeben (2003: 12–13) is not uncommon with LETS. An exchange fund was introduced to stimulate the trading activities through which the participants could pay off their Drop debt. Moreover, alongside private individuals, business and non-profit institutions also became involved. The LCW organization thus proved itself to be a flexible organization, which was able to adapt to changing circumstances. A process approach was used in this regard.

Participating Asylum Seekers

Prior to the start of the LCW project, contact between asylum seekers was limited. There was little desire for contact in a place in which everyone was

preoccupied with their own problems. Moreover, contact was hampered by linguistic and cultural differences. The asylum seekers also pointed to the standoffish attitude of the host community. Before the LCW project, the asylum seekers also frequently did not trust each other. The asylum seekers interviewed describe this situation as one of distrust, which generally became evident through arguments and problematic situations. The lack of mutual contact seemed to go hand in hand with no or a low degree of balanced reciprocity.

During the pre-project phase, there was just as little contact between the interviewed asylum seekers and the local population. Those interviewed spoke about the host community's lack of trust in asylum seekers and said that the locals were scared. In short, at the outset, there was hardly any interpersonal trust between the asylum seekers themselves and between the asylum seekers and the host community.

While the LCW was being set up, the English and Spanish speaking asylum seekers acted as intermediaries between the asylum seekers and the locals. They exchanged ideas and needs. Some people from this group of 'translators' became involved in the LCW project. For instance, one asylum seeker noted that he started doing LETS odd jobs for a group that already knew each other. The first impression and expectations about the trade system varied according to each individual. Most asylum seekers enjoyed doing something for others, primarily because they otherwise did so little at the refugee centre. The asylum seekers who were able to communicate with the Dutch and with other asylum seekers were able to increase their contacts throughout the course of the project. After several weeks, increasingly more mutual trust developed between the host community and the asylum seekers.

Apart from these general findings, differences were also found between the participants, which will be presented in the form of ideal types. We acknowledge that in reality people possess the characteristics of various ideal types, but nonetheless we argue that a clear pattern tends to dominate. These typologies show that as a network the LCW is ideal for bridging given the various functions and needs it can fulfil. The various typologies will be described below: the professional worker, the socializer, the relational worker and the pro-active worker.

The Professional Worker

I became a member, because that was the only way to work. It is difficult to always sit around at home, a man is meant to work. The great thing about work is that it keeps you busy. I bought stuff with the Drops, like a second-hand video-camera (Armenian, aged 35).

The professional workers'—five of those interviewed—motivation to participate in the LCW was that it gave them the opportunity to work. This offered them more possibilities to get things. They found the whole business of Drops

a nuisance and would have preferred to receive euros instead. These asylum seekers regarded the LCW as an employment agency that provided work and mediation. The professional workers went to work for private individuals and had internships with local firms, but were afraid that the host community was going to take advantage of them. The professional worker regards contact with the host community as impersonal and aims to develop only weak ties to the host community. For the professional workers, the LCW, in which they had strong institutional trust, was a way to achieve balanced reciprocity. The LCW has advantages for both groups; the host community participates because they need cheap labour and the asylum seekers do so because they want to buy things.

The professional workers mainly came into contact with local private individuals and businesses. Due to the diversity of tasks, the professional workers had diverse contacts with the local population and businesses, which prior to this were very restricted. The professional workers were less concerned with developing personal contacts with other asylum seekers or with the host community. The establishment of weak ties played an important role in this regard.

The Socializer

LCW has helped me learn the Dutch language. There were outings, music evenings and weekends, which we took part in. LETS is like a family. The LETS house is like a home where the family gets together. There was real contact with each other! Nel (one of the initiators) helps asylum seekers and calms them down. Dutch people have big mouths, but now their eyes are also opening (man, aged 37, and woman, aged 35, from the former Yugoslavia).

For the socializer—three of the interviewed asylum seekers—the primary motivation to take part was the opportunity to meet more people. This group of asylum seekers wanted to do something and to feel free. The LCW group activities provided a great opportunity to meet local Dutch people and to get some support in this way. They regarded Woudrichem as a home and the LCW as a chance to relax and build a new network. These asylum seekers became friends with the local participants and also got to know other refugees better. In other words, the socializers developed strong social ties and interpersonal trust in other participants. They learned the Dutch language and got to know more about the Dutch culture and traditions.

Prior to their participation in the LCW, some socializers already had contact with acquaintances outside their own group. At that time, trust in the Dutch initiators of the LCW project had grown. Through the LCW activities, the socializers got to know people from the host community as well as other asylum seekers, which sometimes led to social engagements unrelated to LCW activities.

The Relational Worker

I work with my heart, not for the money. I regard Drops as something extra. It is good to work because it helps the time to pass more easily. If you're working, you know what you have to do, being busy is good because you can devote your energy to something. The contact through LETS is also nice. I feel normal again (Iraqi mother, 45 years old).

For the relational workers—five of the interviewed asylum seekers—working means getting involved with other people. The LCW network provides them with both work and social interaction. The relational workers participate because working improves their well-being. In their experience, working contributes to the development of relationships. Participation in the LCW network keeps the relational workers busy and provides them with a diversion. They have a need for personal contact during work and the organized social LCW activities. The relational worker experiences balanced reciprocity as well as generalized reciprocity, because the LCW does not only offer work, but also help and support for the future. The relational worker has faith in the project and the volunteers. He or she has nurtured many personal contacts, which often result in strong ties in their environment.

The relational workers primarily developed social ties with the host community and, during the later phase of the project, also a link with non-profit organizations. These ties were mostly weak. Relational workers did develop some strong ties as a result of LCW's social activities, usually with other asylum seekers. Ties with a few members of the host community also became more personal and developed into friendships.

The Pro-active worker

These days everyone is preoccupied with themselves. Being dependent on money makes people aloof. Life is about more than just money. You shouldn't have to talk about time and money too impersonally, you do that with strangers. At LETS you do things for free and you are thankful for each other. LETS allows asylum seekers to learn things (man, aged 39, from Azerbaijan).

The LCW is a kind of calling for the pro-active worker—four of the interviewees. The pro-active workers are active participants who contribute to the success of the LCW project in different ways. They are involved in the management, initiate new activities or mobilize new members. They are convinced of the importance of LETS for other asylum seekers and they want to improve their living conditions in the asylum seekers' centre. They believe that LETS brings cultures together and creates a bridge between the host community and the asylum seekers, through which the latter are able to extend their networks. They do their best to help the LCW run smoothly and sometimes act as spokespeople for the asylum seekers. They consider the LETS concept to be unique and experience generalized reciprocity, which is

Table 1

Characteristics of Participating Asylum Seekers

	Professional worker	Socializer	Relational worker	Pro-active worker
Nature of social tie	Weak	Strong	Strong	Weak
Nature of reciprocity	Balanced	Generalized	Generalized	Generalized
Nature of trust	Institutional	Interpersonal	Interpersonal and institutional	Institutional
Motivation	Financial progress	Intercultural encounters	Keeping busy	Improvement of position of asylum seekers

due to the additional value of the LCW that provides them with great help and support with respect to work. The pro-active workers' trust in the LCW is mainly institutional in character. They frequently have institutional trust in the project and have recruited new members and interested third parties to the project. As a consequence, they have developed many weak ties.

The pro-active workers act as a bridge between the local network of Dutch participants and the asylum seekers. They participated in various networks: as active volunteers in the organization and as asylum seekers. Due to these ties with both asylum seekers and the host community, they contributed to the development of reciprocal contacts. Moreover, they won the trust of both groups and developed strong ties with various participants. For an overview of the most important typology characteristics, see Table 1.

In sum, the various different types of participating asylum seekers found a meaningful way of spending their time, which also led to opportunities to participate in and integrate into the local society. Prior to the start of the LCW, the asylum seekers had little to no bonding social capital. A mere handful of English and Spanish speaking asylum seekers established contacts with the host community, but these contacts were limited. When the project began, it was these asylum seekers who sought to extend the existing contacts in the local community and to reverse the negative attitude of many locals. They made the generation of bridging social capital between the asylum seekers at the refugee centre on the boat and the host community possible. The bridging and bonding social capital within the LCW also increased thanks to the socializers. Some of them even made social engagements with other participants beyond the scope of the LCW activities.

The Host Community

Before the start of the LCW project, there was barely any contact between the host community and the asylum seekers. Only a few of the interviewees from the host community had already had contact with asylum seekers, but

little mutual trust had actually been built up. Dutch participants, who were active culturally or in the church, described the various networks in the area. Many people tend to know each other by face, which is generally viewed as positive. Apart from these weak ties, there were also strong ties among the Dutch participants. Prior to the beginning of the LCW project, several members of the host community claimed to have a fair amount of understanding for the asylum seekers' predicament, while others harboured a suspicious attitude towards them.

A number of the Dutch respondents had already come into contact with asylum seekers before the LCW project as a result of language classes. At this time, there was hardly any contact between asylum seekers and the host community. Various locals had recruited active participants from their own networks, which they used to convince asylum seekers to participate in the project. Local people were informed about the project through word of mouth or in writing; however, the role of the local media and churches should not go unmentioned.

Some Dutch participants revealed that they were a little scared of the asylum seekers, but felt that they should be given the benefit of the doubt. Another group was immediately open to the asylum seekers given that they believed that these people should become part of the local community. In addition to these general findings, a number of differences between the participants could be identified, which have resulted in the following typologies: the sympathizer, idealist, volunteer and pragmatist.

The Sympathizer

Without the asylum seekers I would never have taken part in a system like this. I wanted to give the asylum seekers a helping hand, I didn't need to get any Drops in return for that. I had already had contact with asylum seekers, but for other Dutch people, LETS offered an ideal way of coming into contact with them. I was only involved in LETS indirectly and especially liked being brought up to date about things (local man, aged 63).

The sympathizers—four of the interviewees—became members of the project to show their support. They have an affinity with asylum seekers and value the project because it seeks to help these people. The sympathizers had often already had contact with the asylum seekers during the pre-project phase. In this way, they could send out the signal that this kind of contact is perfectly normal; they thus served as an example to others. Although the sympathizers were less active participants than the other locals, they regularly took part in activities. This was mainly an example of generalized reciprocity; sympathizers wanted to show them support, rather than have them work. Sympathizers have a direct and interpersonal trust in asylum seekers. Their participation inspired the confidence of other locals, because they were able to help other interested parties cross the threshold to participate in the

project. They do not really have any interest in the LETS principle as such. The sympathizer thus established social ties with asylum seekers, rather than with the other Dutch participants.

The Idealist

The project was set up for asylum seekers. LETS offered a solution to their desire to work. Asylum seekers wanted to do something and they enjoyed the contacts. But LETS shows that you don't get something for nothing. Just like everyone else, asylum seekers also have to give something back. LETS created a balance, LETS isn't charity. I also think it is nice to be able to work for something oneself, that gives asylum seekers self-esteem (Dutch woman, aged 43).

The idealists—five of those interviewed—were attracted to the LETS principle, because it allowed asylum seekers to act autonomously. The idealist believes that it is important for asylum seekers to be integrated into the local community and the LCW makes this possible. In general, the idealist has primarily weak ties in the local community and became involved in the LCW project through word of mouth. Moreover, the idealist finds the LCW interesting, because it is different from just providing aid or charity; people do things together and there is contact on the basis of equality. The idealist is very active within the organization and has generalized reciprocal ties with the asylum seekers. Despite the fact that the idealist does not have any previous experience with asylum seekers, he or she devotes a lot of time to the LCW, which is an institution the idealist has faith in. Involvement in the organization generates more contacts with the host community and asylum seekers for the idealist.

The Volunteer

Dutch people appreciate the project because it has mutual advantages, but it was difficult to find people who also wanted to put a lot of time into it. It was fun to do things together with asylum seekers, only some people had rather a lot of psychological problems. This meant that the expectations people had about asylum seekers had to be more realistic. Differences between people do still exist (Dutch woman, aged 33).

Volunteers—four of those interviewed—are active participants who become involved for reasons of solidarity and humanity. They believe that it is important to do volunteer work for the LCW and other organizations. They deem the work at the LCW meaningful; they enjoy and find it important to work together with other active participants. Volunteers often ended up at the LCW via the church. Given that volunteers have direct contact with asylum seekers, they often develop strong ties to them. They consciously dedicate themselves to helping others; whether they are asylum seekers or another group does not really make much of a difference. In this regard,

general reciprocity can said to be in play; the contact is more important than getting something in return for their efforts. For the volunteer it is all about interpersonal trust. The LCW as an institution is of lesser importance. Moreover, they apply themselves, because other participants have asked them to do so. Partly thanks to these volunteers, the locals from existing networks have got to know each other better. Volunteers have had many personal contacts with both the asylum seekers and Dutch locals previously unfamiliar to them.

The Pragmatist

I approached the LCW because I needed someone for my garden. It is great that asylum seekers want to work, because where can you find a Dutchman these days that wants to do something? Work also means something to them, so that also gives you a good feeling. But above all I was happy that there was someone who could help me (Dutch man, aged 50).

The motivation for the pragmatists—four of the respondents—to take part in the LCW project was the supply of labour. Indeed, the pragmatists—small businessmen and private individuals—needed someone to do something for them; they needed an extra pair of hands. They generally became aware of the existence of the LCW through the local media or acquaintances. There were hardly any LCW participants in the pragmatists' social networks, but instead they had contact with one or two asylum seekers who had carried out work for them. Some pragmatists built bridges for asylum seekers by bringing them into contact with Dutch colleagues or clients. The pragmatists regarded participation in the LCW as a win-win situation from which both parties profited. For this it was not necessary to participate in LCW activities. The pragmatists in the LCW organization believed that they could trust the LCW to mediate on their behalf. In other words, they had great institutional trust in the organization. Table 2 illustrates the most important characteristics of the typologies.

Table 2

Characteristics of the Participating Host Community

	Sympathizer	Idealist	Volunteer	Pragmatist
Nature of social tie	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
Nature of reciprocity	Balanced	Generalized	Generalized	Balanced
Nature of trust	Interpersonal	Institutional	Interpersonal	Institutional
Motivation	Showing support	Empowerment for asylum seekers	Making a meaningful contribution	Meeting own need for help

In short, the existing contacts between the host community were used to recruit active participants. The first enthusiasts—the idealists and volunteers—dedicated themselves to getting asylum seekers to also take part in the project. The LCW organization's attempts to build bridges can be seen as a form of bridging social capital. All of the Dutch participants' bridging social capital was strengthened, since everyone came into contact with other Dutch networks and asylum seekers through their participation in the LCW. In addition to these weak ties that emerged, stronger social ties also sometimes developed, such as friendships between the host community and asylum seekers. Likewise, the idealists' and volunteers' bonding social capital was reinforced. Participation in the project led to more intensive contacts within their own group. Apart from making contacts, people also clearly had pragmatic reasons for participating in the LCW. For some people from the host community, it was easier and cheaper to get odd jobs done through the LCW.

Conclusions

In Woudrichem, the exchange circle made a positive contribution to the local community by bringing about recurring encounters. Subgroups of both the host community and asylum seekers were brought into contact with one another through transactional ties. Within both groups, people with divergent motivations, individualistic or community-directed, were able to work together. The various meeting places, in people's homes as well as the LCW house or in Woudrichem itself, created the possibility of matching up all kinds of different people. In other words, the LCW created possibilities for the generation of bonding and bridging capital between different people and networks. Social and political structures and people's capacity to deal with each other were thus combined, allowing asylum seekers to become a real part of the social fabric of Woudrichem's local community. This would also make it easier for them to take more active steps towards integrating more fully into Dutch society at a later stage. The so-called 'waiting room period' can be avoided, because talents do not have to be wasted while waiting for the asylum procedure to be completed. In particular, the project satisfied the asylum seekers' need for help and work. Since the organization made the match between supply and demand, the project worked to the advantage of both the asylum seekers and the local Dutch participants.

Social leaders and initiators of the project played a significant role in creating the various direct and indirect opportunities for encounters between the various types of asylum seekers and members of the host community. It is notable that the LCW could not succeed as a private initiative alone, but was reliant on entering into a partnership with other organizations from the non-profit and the private sectors. These links created a broader base of social support for the LCW organization. Moreover, it also allowed the asylum seekers and members of the host community to bond with each other. It created a better local society for all parties, which allowed mutual

understanding to develop through contact with one another. Largely due to its multifunctional design, the LCW initiative has demonstrated that it is indeed possible to mobilize different groups of people. The project not only allowed for altruism, but also for self-interest. It allowed for a lack of commitment as well as obligation, to both individuals and the community. The LCW project is one that can be implemented in a variety of locations to join asylum seekers together with the host society.

The LCW is a typical example of a modern organizational form which can generate bridging capital. The trading system—the exchange of products and services—was not the ultimate goal, but instead a means by which familiarity with the other could develop into mutual empathy. The exchange of products and services can be seen as a way of bringing and keeping people together. It provides people with the opportunity of developing weak or strong ties with other participants and ensures that people are brought into regular contact with each other. These contacts led to (more) work for asylum seekers in particular. The LCW trading system was a way in which people could engage in meaningful activities and establish social contacts. Trust between the participants was not a prerequisite for achieving this. Instead, this developed throughout the course of the reciprocal activities for which the LCW laid down the norms and values.

As regards the organization, a LETS circle fits in well with the individualizing society and the changing position of the government. Increasingly self-responsibility, stimulating and equipping oneself for participation in society, is seen to be of primary importance. The LCW was begun with a view to developing potential. People had services and skills to offer and this project sought to empower the asylum seekers. It stimulated them and allowed their competences to be exploited. The success of the Woudrichem LCW project was also due to the emergence of a valuable local network. The LCW initiative was based on factors that transcended ethnicity. The project began by focusing on the interests and needs that people could share with one another, rather than ethnic differences. This repeatedly allowed people to bond with each other, irrespective of their cultural background. Moreover, it offered people the chance to look and see beyond the differences.

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